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Zephyrus

Western Kentucky University

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Editors:

Brittany Lee Cheak
Bradley Englert
Madelyn Gates
Hilary Harlan
Joshua Johnston
Katie Knecht
Amy Lindsey
Michael Miller
Megan Murphy
Abbey Piersma
Mary Rudolph
Anthony Taylor Smith
Samantha Starr
Lea Walker
Ashley Weatherholt

Cover art:
Justin Comley "As the World Burns, We Survive"

Title page art:
Alex Aquirre "The Kintai Is Comfort"

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Art coordination: Mike Nichols

Faculty advisor: David LeNoir

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Award Winners

Jim Wayne Miller Poetry Award
Kyle Marshall
"An Envoy to the Ancestral Spirits"

Browning Literary Club Poetry Award
Maddey Gates
"Ten Reasons Why I Don't Care That You Un-Friended Me on Facebook"

Ann Travelstead Fiction Award of the Ladies Literary Club
Rachel Hoge
"Knots"

Wanda Gatlin Essay Award
Michael Miller
"In the Tongues of Men and of Angels"

Zephyrus Art Award
Justin Comley
"Just Graphite and Time"

Writing award recipients are chosen by the Creative Writing faculty of WKU; the art award is chosen by *Zephyrus* staff.

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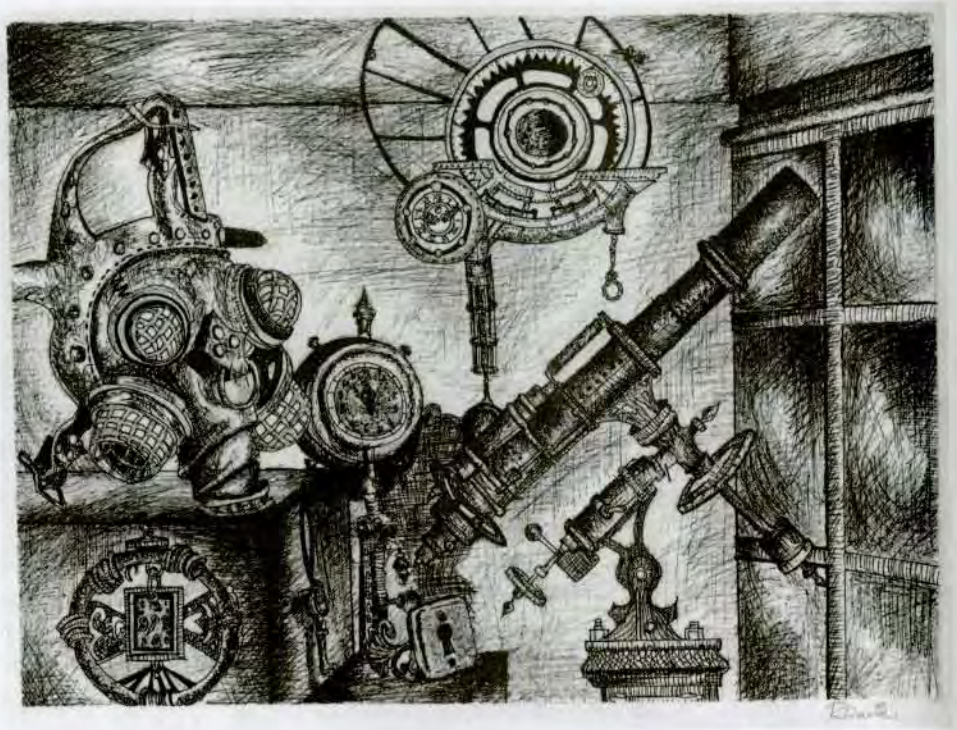


Rebecca Davis **Steampunk**

Over the Moon, Under the Sun
Kirby Fields

We build a teleportation machine to escape the heat.
With melting crayons, I draw boxy, red and green cars
on the cardboard side. "That way it will go extra fast,"
I tell Steven.

We climb inside and leave the hose on,
Drowning the yellow grass around us.
Steven tosses an old beach towel on top to serve as the roof.
Light shines through the tired fabric.

Our sweating legs stick together in the cramped quarters.
We travel to the beach, the moon.

When we hear Steven's mother shouting his name,
he covers my mouth with his tan, sweating hand.
"As long as we remain silent, no one will be able to see us,"
he tells me.
Then he presses his lips against mine.
He smells like chocolate and waffles.

We sit silently for a few minutes and then we dismantle the
machine.
We never told a soul of what we had built.

Dawning
Isiah Fish

Honestly, let's be honest.
We're staying together for the sake of the cats.
It would rip them apart to see us ripped apart.
And since we're being honest, there's something
wrong with society's stance on slurping.
I slurp loud for all to hear!
It's a fun sound, and it lets the people know I
appreciate a damn good drink!
Slurping should be mandatory now that you know
the importance of it.
Slurp.
Now, let's talk about the man who offered to buy
me a glass of milk at the bar. Enough said.
Did I ever tell you that the sound of crescendoing
violins make me want to cry?
Actually, I do cry, but you can't see it.
It's an internal cry.
I'm doing it right now.
It kind of feels like my brain is precipitating love.
Or something.
Have you ever smelled the incredibly fresh breath of a
grizzly bear?
That's what my armpit smells like.
You can sniff it if you want.
I want to live long enough to tell pre-apocalyptic
anecdotes to a post-apocalyptic society.
I want to be a paper boy just so I can tell my lover
"Put me on a bike and kiss me, stupid. I'm off to deliver
the obsolete morning papers."
Have you ever noticed that there are two types of people
in the world: slow-walkers and fast-walkers.
I see it as a huge divider.

When I huff on my postprandial cigar,
I'm secretly posing for the squirrels in the yard.
They think I'm a drug lord and who am I to tamper with their
assumptions?
Sometimes, in the mornings, I wake up early without an alarm.
I rise with the sun like my soul is connected to the ascension.
My bed is the horizon.
I am the sun.

Red Soda Circus
Isiah Fish

I see you getting coffee after so many years
of not seeing you while I got my coffee alone
and I walk towards you to ask how you've been,
maybe hug you, maybe even give you the slightest
cheek kiss and tell you that since we last saw
each other I've been recruited by the circus
For my unusual talent of dissecting cadavers
to further understand how people love.
I can entertain you with stories about Penelope,
the circus lion and how she loathes tap shoes
but adores tutus. I bet you've never seen a full
grown female lion in a tickle-me-pink tutu
before. I could tell you about Richard
the Ringleader or the poodles that do back-handsprings
for doggie biscuits or why I want to cry
when I watch Penelope jump through a ring of fire.
I could give you a free pass to come see me
in the most spectacular show on Earth
and if you come maybe you'll remember how we tasted
like red soda the first time we kissed
because you were thirsty and all I had was Big Red.
I want to light your face up like a carnival
at night in the rain and I want you to enjoy peanuts
and cotton-candy while watching the elephant
named Salvador paint a picture of clocks.
I want you to witness Maria and how she hypnotizes panthers
by blowing silver kisses dusted with lavender.
I want you to feel like you have all the time in the world
to do all the things you ever wanted
while Sylvester the fire-breather spits flames
and Pierre rides his unicycle in a handstand with a bouquet
of roses clenched

between his ankles. I'll give you your own bouquet of roses
and before you go to sleep you can smell them and dream
about going to breakfast with Salvador and sharing a
cantaloupe with
Maria. You get your coffee and turn away to walk out the door,
and I wish I would've become a trapeze artist because then I
would know
how to walk on tightropes.

Get Me a Six-Pack of Sestina and a Fifth of Cherry Burnett's

Maddey Gates

The streets were slick with snow and broken glass.
We spilled across the hill like whiskey, our clothes dark in case
anyone was looking. February wind poured one last drink
between my chapped lips. I curled my frosted legs around
Kevin's back, "I can
walk" while Calvin fixed the back of my dress, put a cap
on my words, on the night like I was the last drained bottle.

In a house in the belly-curve of Park Street we shared a bottle
of Jim Beam and I told you I could smell home from the rim of
my glass.
Suddenly rooms full of strangers poured in around us. I
dropped the cap
and cursed. You smiled while I cried my weathered case
for feeling dizzy and why small-talk was hiding inside a can
of warm Bud Light. You stashed the bourbon in a cabinet,
found me a softer drink.

In your bedroom the night we pressed together, began to drink
the breath from one another as we shared spiced rum from your
red water bottle,
I felt myself stand above us shaking my head while our bodies
cried: "yes we can,
damnit!" and for a moment my churning mind was an hourglass
frozen and slanted, before the metaphor shattered and the case
against us did too—the past was just a tooth-bent bottle cap.

Onto the vodka-swamped garage floor I dropped someone's
baseball cap
while you helped me onto the washing machine. I tried to drink
from the musty air a draught of memory strong enough to last in
case

you had to carry me home. My mother prays over her bottle
of organic soymilk every morning that I stay far from the path of
broken glass,
daddy keeps a bottle-cap-cross over the mantel and smiles to an
angel of a beer can.

One night we walked around the city to remind ourselves we can
slip through the night, skipping cracks in the sidewalks and cap
off semesters with thoughtless flights into each others arms. The
sky was glass,
fogged with storms from rising breaths. "Sometimes the drink
goes down smoother than the truth." You walked in a shadow
while our last bottle
of unspoken words hit the pavement without cracking. I asked
my brother to buy us another case.

You gave me twenty dollars for a cheap case
of Highlife to share and said keep the change. I said "you can
have anything you want tonight," opening my jeans like the first
cold bottle.
Last winter the cold had wicked hands--snow forced me under
my cap
and into so many arms, none of them yours. I made up my mind
to drink
the past away through a bendy straw. In August I found you
grinning on the rim of my glass.

In any case like ours someone is bound to find the missing cap
under the table, or one that can serve the purpose--to keep the
last drink
from going loose, or the bottle from joining the roadside glass.

Ten Reasons Why I Don't Care That You Un-Friended Me on Facebook
Maddey Gates

Number one is I really do,
and number two is how I can
call that a lie—claiming
poetic permission because you
slept with my brother's ex-
girlfriend and continue
to do so and post about it
on your Tumblr—which I
no longer follow—complete
with disposable camera photographs
that deco-podge themselves
to my brain Like the nude victoria's
secret A-cup I spied
on your old roommate's dresser,
though I guess it had a right
to be there as much as on yours
since he moved out and left you
alone in Minton on the floor
where my friends slept,
three floors down from where I slept,
in the bed where we once slept.
But number three is that I'm happy
now with my choices for which
you never cared to hide your disdain,
and number four is that I never Liked
that part of you that never Liked
what was beautiful, even though now
you found some bones wrapped
in silky flesh to hold your red wine
and shivering body—the first of which
she bought and the second, she won.
And number five is that my brother

who is my hero and my idol
and the one I would take my life to save his for
never Liked you anyway,
and number six is that I have other ways
to walk through the tunnel in Tyler Park
and to write until my lips are raw,
and one of your friends has chosen me
for this and shows me poetry,
and number seven is I deserve
what I get from you because of what
I did to you and how I locked the door
on you when you were beating it down
and He was lying in the bed where we—
I am not at fault for living
with my hands forever clenching, unclenching
and my muscle memory impeccable,
knowing exactly how each line faded
between us—and number eight is
you being happy and how I am happy
and how I am happy for you.
I never thought that number nine
would be forgetting that you
were once everything that means
anything and how the seasons
pressed into our skin like ink
and how I drove so many miles—only to you.
So for number ten, I will tell you that
I do care that you have taken yourself
to a place where I must draw far too deeply
to find even a drop of you,
and that I will never be rid of the lines

we wrote because they are in my veins.
You are there, a speck of graphite
beneath skin above the knuckle,
and are more than photographs
I have lost permission to access
or one hundred and seventy two
mutual friends.

In Car(s) With Boy(s): A Four Act Memory

Maddey Gates

A Short Introduction (From a Wikipedia Article on "Intimate Relationship")

"Intimacy" redirects here. For other uses, see Intimacy (disambiguation).
"Paramour" redirects here. For the band, see Paramore.

Intimate relationships play a central role in the overall human experience. Humans have a universal want to belong and to love, which is satisfied within an intimate relationship. Intimate relationships consist of the people that we are attracted to, whom we like and love, romantic and sexual relationships, and those whom we marry and provide and receive emotional and personal support from. Intimate relationships provide people with a social network of people that provide strong emotional attachments and fulfill our universal needs of belonging and the need to be cared for.

In new relationships, sexual intimacy may develop slowly and in a predictable way. Research by Desmond Morris, a behavioral psychologist, found that most new relationships followed 12 predictable steps on the path to sexual intimacy. Couples that rushed through the steps or skipped steps were most likely to break up. The 12 steps he identified (in order) are: Eye to Body, Eye to Eye, Voice to Voice, Hand to Hand, Arm to Shoulder, Arm to Waist, Mouth to Mouth, Hand to Head, Hand to Body, Mouth to Breast, Hand to Genitals, and finally, Sexual Intercourse.

Setting:

Corner of Cardwell Lane and C. Michael Davenport Boulevard, old Chevron Station (closed for refurbishing), back parking lot/loading zone, 1998 black Volkswagon Passat, front passenger seat, on top, right knee pressed into emergency brake.

1 Cougar Lane, Collins Lane Elementary parking lot, fourth basketball goal to the right, straddling two spots, twenty feet from closest light, steamy and cramped, mom and dad's 2006 silver Toyota Camry, underneath him, front passenger seat (upholstery: gray, factory standard), thighs against door handle, middle console, emergency brake.

300 Coffeetree Road, Kentucky Department for Library and Archives, far-back parking lot, between two bookmobiles, across middle console then front passenger seat, head between dashboard and sun visor,

(printed safety warning deems this position unsafe), windows down, emergency brake forgotten.

No known address, Kentucky Capitol Overlook, near top of Louisville Road hill, just before the curve, lower section parking lot, spot closest to trash can and historical marker. 1998 black Volswagon Passat again, back seat, positions alternating, head crushed against door handle and window, emergency brake engaged.

Cast of Characters:

The first time we kissed was on my side porch swing—a blanket draped over our heads like a tent. I always remember the sound of his breath and how my only thought of the time was cliché and absurd. Pillows—I told him—your lips are so massive.

Somewhere between Collins Lane and Meadow Glen his hand slipped between my thighs. At the intersection of Louisville and Buford Van Meter roads he pressed against cotton and lower as the light changed. My breath caught on his name like a dress on a barbed wire fence.

On the table of my mind I will place our names, side by side, and tap them like mason jars. I would fill them to the rim with names of the children we would raise together. Careful, the lids must be airtight, I thought. I have never known sounds so raw on my tongue.

When I catch a lightening bug I choose a name and whisper into my cupped palms. I watch it rise, black against the evening sky.

Time:

Before eleven, after nine, before curfew, both sixteen, three minutes from his house, too early for us, my second boy, our first try.

Before midnight, after sunset, close to curfew, after hours, late February-early March, high school Juniors, much too fast.

After practice, before dinner, mid-May, sunshine, routine but risky, half an hour, practiced, perfected, ten minute silence home.

Almost midnight, almost curfew, too late to stop, too much at risk, freak cold spell, sixteen and seventeen, home late, morning too soon.

Dialogue:

It was only the sweat of our bodies who spoke. The floor of the high s

chool cafeteria glistened. I clung to his turquoise dress shirt as T.I. told us we could have whatever we liked—I believed him.

It's always something simple just before it happens. A word, a question, gasps or a bitten bottom lip. You sure? Maddey? Do you really want me to? Yes please now do it baby don't stop.

Every night I asked him to tell me something that he loved about me.

We went to the overlook to say goodbye. He didn't know, but he had a bad feeling. It was July by then and I cried for the first thirty minutes. Later, we drove away in separate cars, opposite directions. He went up the hill and I went down.

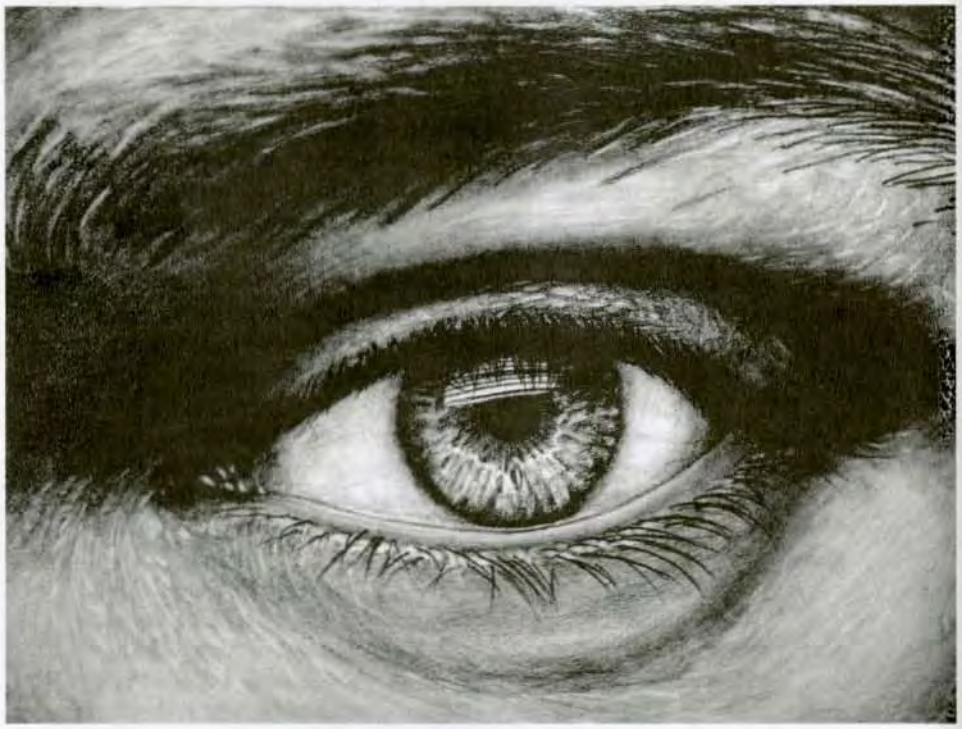
Motivation?

I told him it was okay when I touched him and he went cold. You're nervous—I said—it's sometimes hard to do outside. But we're in your car—he told me—I don't know what's wrong. His eyes were wide and mine were kinder than I felt like being that night.

I don't remember words. We fell panting into darkness, shocked by other headlights. Somehow, we figured we'd be sheltered and the clock would give enough time before curfew. It was Sunday and as we drove away I imagined the child who would find what we left the next morning.

I brought him back to a place I remembered, part joke and part poetic justice. It was a way to settle into him and out of Nels, who had been my first and still lingered under my skin somehow. I tried to cleanse myself that day. I pulled him into me and pushed out the parts that were seeded with resentment like teardrop spider eggs. Then I tried to fill up something that was empty. It almost worked.

It was cold and our breath settled on the glass, freezing. Oh no—he groaned, scraping ice from the windshield. We chased curfew through sick yellow lights—Louisville, Cardwell, Meadow Glen, Leathers—and he wiped the glass with the sleeve of his fleece. I drove him home. He sat, taking me in, while I heard my breath curling, weaving through the air between us—silent as snow.



Justin Comley **Just Graphite and Time**

Whiskey Breath
Ellen Hatler

Tonight, tonight, we are chlorine wet skin, steamy and
sticky with sweat,
And we glow like foxfire under the heavy August moon,
pretense of formal red dresses
With built-in bras and vomit yellow ties that no one really
likes all scattered
Aside on cracked and damp blue tiles. Whiskey breath
moans and 90 degree heat,
While rough palms beg me, no, no don't think about it, just
feel the cool, wrinkled concrete
Against my toes, deep underwater where you can't see
them curl.
Tomorrow, tomorrow, we'll deny it all, our moonlit
monstrosity swallowed up
By suit jackets and tea-length cocktail dresses, my sweet
smile never betraying what
My sweet mouth has done.

Knots

Rachel Hoge

Sara hated when she had to be naked. She would look in the mirror and slant her shoulders, exploring the slope of her uncovered body. She imagined what Scott saw when they made love. So much time had passed, she wondered if he remembered.

She unclothed like a puzzle, shedding her pieces, placing them in piles to remember where they went. She slid facedown between the cotton sheets, and waited for her massage.

"Ready?"

Sara glanced up and nodded. There was a woman standing in the doorway, with short hair and light brown skin. She spoke with a Vietnamese accent.

"You come from doctor?" the woman asked, holding a clipboard.

"The chiropractor," Sara said. Sara had been having back pains for weeks, the result of too many hours spent hunched over her desk. Scott's sister, Lilly, had insisted Sara get it checked out; but when Sara arrived at her appointment, the doctor said, "There's no point adjusting tense muscles— it's like trying to drink wine while it's still grape juice." He added, then, for clarification, "Go get a massage."

The masseuse peered between Sara and her clipboard. "I'm Tannie," she said. Sara had to concentrate to understand her accent. "I fix your back."

Tannie pumped oil into her hands and spread it across Sara's back. Her hands glided against Sara's skin, stopping at the bottom of her spine.

"Not good," Tannie said.

Sara asked, with her head down, "Not good?"

"Knots," Tannie answered, *"many* knots."

She began kneading her hands against Sara's back. Sara grimaced, her hands contorted in a tight fist. She imagined her skin as dough— beginning as a huge, unmanageable ball, but stretching gradually under Tannie's palms until it spread like jelly.

"Relax," Tannie instructed. "Don't tense."

Her hands found another knot, this time on Sara's right shoulder. She bent her fingers and circled the muscle, increasing pressure with every lap. Sara's skin burned.

"That hurts," Sara said. Tannie's fingers stopped briefly as she muttered an apology. Within a moment, though, her hands were pressing in the same, familiar way she had before. Sara grinded her teeth.

***

She complained as soon as she got home.

"She *killed* my back," Sara said. She leaned against her chair and

rubbed her shoulders, an irritated frown on her face.

"You're exaggerating," Scott said, laughing as he glanced up from the paper. "Why you would pay for something like that, though, is *beyond* me."

"The chiropractor told her to," Lilly said. Sara liked having Lilly over. The house was quiet without her.

"Chiropractors are quacks," Scott said. He was a lawyer, and had a natural skepticism towards medicine.

Sara ignored him. "I have a follow-up appointment," she said. "Next month."

"Are you going?" he asked.

Sara shrugged, and Scott crossed his ankles under the table. His foot collided with a cardboard box full of Sara's clothes. "When are you going to finish moving in?" he asked. "It's been months."

"I'll get to it," she said.

Scott returned to his newspaper.

***

Tannie's palms were pressed against Sara's shoulder blades, and Sara was biting her lip, trying not to concentrate on the pressure.

Since her last massage, Sara had felt better, younger. She could even sit at her desk longer before squirming in pain. She knew it was progress, but it wasn't enough— so she returned to Tannie.

Tannie's fingertips framed Sara's shoulders, burrowing into the sting. Sara fought for a distraction.

"So," Sara said, "you're from Vietnam?"

Sara learned that Tannie grew up in the mountains, where the summers were blistering and the winters were bitter. Tannie's mother would cook pho' noodles all year, because the ingredients—vegetables, brisket, and soy sauce— were cheap, and filling. In the summer, steam from the broth would rise to Tannie's skin and make her stomach boil.

Tannie had worn an *Ao' Da'i* everyday to school, the dress covering her wrists and ankles, restraining her movements. She had resented wearing them, but once she moved to America, she cherished them.

"I bought my daughter one," she said, shaking her head. "Still in closet."

Tannie was seventeen when she met Tha'nh, her fiancé. Her mother had spent the entire morning ironing Tannie's lavender *Ao' Da'i*, dabbing her wrists with perfume and lining her lips in pink. After the arrangement, Tannie laid in bed for hours crying, while her two younger sisters rubbed her scalp.

The next morning, Tannie and her mother fixed breakfast— rice steamed with brown sugar and mung beans, wrapped in coconut leaves— and Tannie learned what marriage was.

"'Cook, have child," Tannie said, "and be thin.' She told me that was the best life."

Tha'nh and Tannie were still newlyweds when they immigrated to America.

"Do you miss home?" Sara asked.

"I miss grass, and mountains," Tannie said. "I miss family, especially my sisters. It has been long time since I've been to *Cai Luong*, to see the show. I loved to hear the singing."

Sara paused, then asked, "Tannie isn't your real name?"

"No, it is Nguyet."

"Why'd you change it?"

"Because," Tannie said, smiling, "Americans cannot pronounce *anything*."

***

Sara began looking forward to her monthly appointments with Tannie. Her sore muscles would burn at first, but when she closed her eyes and listened to Tannie's stories, her body's tension eased into the background.

Tannie liked giving advice. She told Sara what home remedies to use for a cold, and which recipes to try. She was shocked that Sara didn't own a rolling pin.

"How do you bake cherry pie?" she asked. When Tannie had watched television in Vietnam, Americans always ate cherry pie. She never doubted that it was true.

"I don't," Sara answered, laughing.

Tannie looked at her, eyebrows raised. "You are not American," she said.

At her next appointment, Sara immediately noticed the receptionist was new. Sara was sitting, legs crossed, waiting for her appointment; Tannie was standing beside the newcomer, speaking Vietnamese.

Sara walked towards the counter, noticing Tannie and the woman's resemblance.

"Is she your daughter?" Sara asked.

"Lyn, my youngest," Tannie said. "This her first job."

"The one who got accepted into college?" Sara asked. Tannie had five children, and spoke of them often.

"*Me'*," Lyn said, addressing her mom. "Do you have to tell *everyone*?"

Tannie smiled, and asked Sara, "You have children?"

"No," Sara said, looking unease.

"How is husband—Scott?" Tannie asked. Tannie had seen Scott in the waiting room before, playing with his Blackberry and

propping his briefcase on his knee.

"Scott's fine," Sara said. "But he's not my husband—just my boyfriend."

"How long have you been dating?" Lyn asked, seeming interested.

"Two years," Sara said.

"I hear wedding bells," Lyn said, grinning. Sara smiled politely and shook her head, crossing her arms against her chest.

After Sara slipped between the sheets, Tannie knocked on the door. She came in quietly, rubbing oils between her hands.

"Why no marry him?" Tannie asked.

Sara shifted uncomfortably in the bed. "It's just not the right time," she said.

"Did he propose?" Tannie asked.

"Twice," Sara said.

"What problem? No love?"

Sara sank her face into the pillow. There were some things she wished she could forget.

Scott's dad, Dave, had been in the hospital six months ago for chemotherapy. A few weeks into his treatment, Dave's cancer was found to be terminal. Scott had wandered around the hospital, searching for vending machines and candy bars.

"He wanted you to go with him, you know," Dave said.

"I didn't want you to be alone," Sara said.

"I'm old," Dave said. "Alone is what I do best." He smiled, the skin on his face stretching across his bones like elastic. "Scott's a different story, though."

Sara glanced at the clock, realizing it was almost eight. "I can't believe they haven't brought your dinner yet. I'm going to talk to the nurse—"

"Wait," David interrupted. Sara sat back down, startled. "Listen… I blame myself for how dependent Scott is. He got used to me not being around, not being there… Did you know I missed his graduation?"

"Why are you telling me this?"

"He's going to need you after I die," Dave said. "Take care of him, please. For me."

Sara knew she could be strong enough for both her and Scott. She also knew she shouldn't, not if she would eventually leave. She had wanted to move out months before, but when Dave's cancer returned, it seemed too cruel.

After the funeral she took care of Scott, just like Dave had wanted. But she knew part of taking care of him meant not misleading him. So when Scott was better, Sara moved out— certain she was doing the right thing. Scott disagreed, calling incessantly and visiting her at work. He thought he loved enough for the both of them. Guilt consumed Sara, Dave's words emblazed in her memory. So when Scott begged, she returned to him.

"Does he hurt?" Tannie asked.

"I don't know," Sara said. Sometimes she'd stare at him when he wasn't looking, desperate to find something she hadn't seen—a way to make them into pieces that fit. "Doesn't everybody?"

***

The next month, Sara arrived for her usual massage to find Tannie gone.

"My grandmother's sick," Lyn said, apologizing for forgetting to call. "Mom got on a plane this morning to Vietnam."

"I'm sorry," Sara said. "I really am… when do you think she'll be back?"

Lyn looked at her, confused. "She's staying," she said. "My grandmother has Alzheimer's. Mom's all she has… it's her duty."

Sara felt dizzy. "Duty?" she repeated, and Lyn nodded.

"But what about my knots?" she asked, feeling selfish as soon as she said it.

Lyn pursed her lips to answer, and closed her mouth again. "I just remembered," she said, "Mom told me to give you something."

Lyn went into the office and when she returned, she was holding a rolling pin.

"She said you needed it," Lyn said, handing it to Sara. "Does that make sense?"

Sara ran her hands across the wood, wishing she could lay her problems on the counter and squash them.

***

Sara's hands were stained red.

She tossed the cherries in a bowl and grabbed another handful, using a meat pounder to smash the skin and remove the pits. She added sugar and cornstarch to the bowl and mixed them together, watching each ingredient compromise its color, turning a shade of burgundy.

She combined the flour and sugar, kneading her hands against the dense dough, wondering if this was how Tannie had felt when she removed Sara's knots. Scott walked through the front door, holding a bag of takeout.

"Sara," he said, looking stunned, "what's this?"

"Surprise," she said. "Thought I'd make us dessert."

"Smells amazing," he said, kissing her cheek. "How'd you know I love cherry pie?"

He put the takeout on the table and stretched his legs. He was shocked to find he had space.

"You moved the box?" he asked.

"Not just the box," she said. "I moved back in."

He stared at her in amazement. "I'm glad," he said, looking better than he had in months. Unsure of what else to say, he asked, "Ready to eat?"

"I should finish first… I already mixed the dough."

"I'll wait for you," he said. He read the newspaper, glancing up at her every few minutes, smiling. Sara held the outer handles of Tannie's rolling pin and flattened the dough, her hands raw against the wood. She compressed the dough desperately, rolling the handles faster, finding lumps and digging her palms into them. Her hands were dry and caked in flour; the skin around her knuckles were peeling, and threatening to bleed.

Sara stared at the lifeless dough lying on the counter, imagining this as its final surrender. She cut it into thin strips, placing them carefully on top, and put the pan in the oven. She narrowed her eyes through the glass of the oven door as she watched the dough rise, obediently, like she knew it would. It was its duty.

On Helping People
Amy Lindsey

When I die
plant me by the oak tree.
See how much shade it provides
with the extra nutrients.

When I die
take me to the taxidermist,
stand me up in the corn field
and watch me scare away the crows.

When I die
Cook me up and
feed me to the
starving children.

When I die
cut me up and place me
in a trash bag.
Put me in the woods and
see how long it takes the bugs
to clean my bones.

I Fold to This End: You Might Have Loved Me
Tracy Jo Ingram

Ticks and sticks,
like they're hungry for blood,
lick holes in the wounds
of my womb.
I am quiet when I sit near you.

Your mouth slips steady
like suicide and leaky faucets,
words unsaid in the moss
that grows behind my ears,
worn heavy like the thick beard
brushing the beer can on your top lip.

I am talking about the camping trip we took
in the mountains of eastern Kentucky
when you fucked me and walked out of the tent
to smoke a cigarette. Your expression
slumped heavy on the log. Cinders to ash
in a sleeping bag worn thin and cold.

Except we both know this didn't happen.
nothing this poetic, nothing this pathetic.

Instead you got too high at the Mercy Lounge
in Nashville while I was in the bathroom
snorting lines off of credit cards
with plastic girl-drones

and you danced in the bar with vacant eyes,
and the disco balls and the bass blinding,
fingers gripped on the throat of a bottle,

and you packaged me up tightly,
assuredly to take up less space,
and tossed me somewhere into the garbage can
of your mind,

ribs clanging against the sides
of all the other discarded glass.

Preparing a Meal from the Garden with J. Calloway
Tracy Jo Ingram

I remember when we started
and you had to plow down deep
twenty years worth of dry soil,
untreated and untouched. It was a bright
day in April, already southern Kentucky humid,
and the dogwoods lining campus
blew the scent of sex in the air.
Students held their noses when they walked through the blooms,
marveling at the forthright open-air fragrance of foreplay,
but didn't tell each other how urgent it made any of us feel.
I'd known you just long enough, knew you knew just enough
to teach me how to bear the efforts
of a job well done. When we
lay out in your plot for the first time,
I wiped the sweat from your thick brow
and dug until I replaced it.
There was something sweet in your muck—
something in mine I didn't even know I had,
lush and hush and unspoken for.
Something 'bout the way the bees swarmed
in and out, between our petals touching.
'Bout the way your hands were hardened,
the calluses of a man who knew
a thousand harvests,
the way those eyes said you'd keep working
'til the work was done.
You'd be the first to teach me how
to put dirt beneath fingernails, and keep it there.
And the first to teach me how to use my thumb
to push down the seed, and the first to make me earn a meal.
We'd rise at dawn and pull
the grapes from the vine. One
by one. We'd head out to the hen house

and come to roost. We'd pick the blackberries
and crush the juice in between our palms,
staining these saintly days. We'd take it to the kitchen
and cut onions 'til our eyes were raw and weary.
Shuck corn 'til our arms were worn
and the kernels left slack in our jaw.
We'd feast on a banquet of our mighty, bodily struggle
and wake in the morning to see it through again.
You would be the first to teach me
how to see the sun rise,
how to release the tension in my back,
to smile at the fruits
of my labor, wiggle my toes deep into the loam
and dig in again and again.

An Envoy to the Ancestral Spirits
Kyle Marshall

". . . so much time is wasted as Stravinsky thinks he is the only one who knows anything about music." Vaslav Nijinsky

I wonder if the neighbor boys ever messed-up
Igor Stravinsky's house;
that would surely explain his dissonant music.
Often the things done
to us in childhood alter the way
we think as an adult, but we can't all

become famous composers because of it. All
that matters is going up.
Even if that movement would disrupt the way
the Earth spins on its axis. I live in an unfinished house
of Stravinsky's skeletons. One day it will be done,
and it will be a house of my own. The music

I will compose will sound nothing like Stravinsky's music.
Just as his sounds nothing like the songbird's. All
of the blades of grass in a field are important. John Donne's
The Flea makes me squeamish, but sexed-up
bloodsuckers are as real and necessary as love. We will die in
the houses
we lived in, the roof will struggle to hold back the water. Our
bodies have a strange way

of imprisoning our souls; allow me to weigh-
in. The eyes bombard the soul with a cacophony of images:
music
of a first kiss, the coffin of your best friend, your childhood
home

burning down, your dog contently laying her head on your lap.
All
of your nerves perform shock therapy on your brain. And if
you don't attempt upwards
movement, you life will be done.

When I bake cookies I like to watch through the glass until
they're done,
I prefer doing it that way
because watching the dough slowly work its way up
makes me feel like Stravinsky – accomplished. Rite of Spring
was discordant music
that enraged people back in 1913. It's all
but tame elevator music now; though, the bassoon solo still
brings down the house.

I sincerely hope that Stravinsky's house
wasn't connected to the Earth. I imagine it done up
with balloons to reach for the sky. All
people deserve a way
to escape the withering whirlwind of their music,
to end the stasis of childhood hurt and to grow up.

Sometimes, after I throw up my whisky and think life is done,
I abstractly reflect on Stravinsky's house and the way
his music is a maelstrom tearing at us all.

Alex McNeilage

Chicken

In the Tongues of Men and of Angels

Michael Miller

There are two Pilot gas stations standing at either end off exit twenty-three at Pendleton, Kentucky. The only thing distinguishing the stations is that one offers a Subway and the other a McDonald's. Across the street is a sex shop alternately called Cheap Smokes and Love Stuff. Farther, there is a Marathon, a BP, and a condemned ice cream parlor that used to be called Taylor's. But twelve miles down the road, through the cornfields and hills mounted with twisted trees is New Castle: a town of unspoken visions, of brave men with visions, and I with visions of my own.

My father was the music minister at the small church of New Castle First Baptist in Henry County, Kentucky. Unlike most in the church, my mother and father were not from a family of farmers. We only owned an acre and a quarter of land in a subdivision twenty miles away from the town, which is to say in the minds of those at the church, we didn't own any land at all. Dad didn't know how to raise tobacco or kill chickens and Mom never grew thyme or sweet potatoes according to the cycles of the moon.

The former churches where my father served and attended before were large and in towns with more than nine hundred people. After being accepted into New Castle, we began to believe the church was without all the problems we'd thought were inherent in religion. The ideologies of the church were more like that of a bell curve with a hundred member mass of moderate believers in-between.

The outside of the church looked more like a shotgun brick-and-mortar Greek temple than a Baptist church in northern Kentucky. The church felt so much smaller from the inside when we walked into the sanctuary for the first time in 1998. The high walls were painted yellow like the three tall windows facing out from the pulpit, making everything seem doused in the morning. The ceiling stood three stories above and was made of hundreds of interlocking circling lines that looked like a solid wall of stained glass painted over in white.

Sunday nights during choir practice, I sat on the front pew, watching my father's hands conduct the choir until my mind knew the hands to be the push of the strings and blow of the brass like hands shaping a round mass from a pool of dark water. I still conduct with my hands when I listen to music alone: father and son forever inflicting the air with colors and shapes.

In children's Sunday school, I learned of greed from Zac-chaeus, doubting from Thomas, and loyalty from Peter. But I felt closer

to the outcasts of scripture – the men and women who were transformed by their sin. Samson was beautiful to me without his eyes and without his strength. I spent more time looking at the picture in my Storybook Bible of Satan falling from grace than of Christ suffering on the cross. We once read of King Nebuchadnezzar, who God condemned to live seven years as an animal for thinking himself to be greater than He. Daniel 5:21 says the King was "driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird." I recognized myself in these verses. Becoming a creature was his punishment, but how free he must have felt to be a wild animal without his kingdoms and greed or sacrifices to be offered up to the flames.

Cory was one of the boys who became my friend for no other reason than because our parents met in choir practice at my father's old church. Somewhere in the photo albums in the attic, my mother still has a picture of us when we're babies and looking over the edge of the bathtub. He had dark skin and forever smelled like pee and ochre. We had nothing in common, but had no idea we ever needed anything in common. Growing up in the back seats of a series of minivans, we knew one another by the favorite things we shared. Our favorite show was *Scooby-Doo* and our favorite drink was cream soda, both of which we thought were enough to cement a friendship well into eternity.

I was five and he was six. He had just come over to my house after watching a baseball game at the Louisville Slugger Stadium. Cory was totally interested in the game and talked to my dad about the pitches and the players while I napped in the sticky plastic stadium chair and sucked on salted raisins.

Cory's hands were sticky like the stadium chair. I loved him in a sort of pure and frantic way that surprises me now – totally trusting and completely willing, never the idea that there was such a thing as self-consciousness. I stopped seeing Cory after my parents left their old church. The last time I saw him was at his tenth birthday party. He didn't invite me, but his parents did. I saw him playing hockey in the driveway with a friend of his he had met in school. Cory's parents invited me to play, but I didn't know how, so when Cory's friend turned his face, I hit him across the cheek with the handle of the hockey stick. I'd never hit anyone before and I was surprised to see the boy wasn't laughing when he looked up from the ground with a soft streak of blood across his face.

Growing up in New Castle, I knew myself to be that animal, that King Nebuchadnezzar. I spoke an animal language and followed animal laws, loud and laughing, thrashing and screaming and biting little boys and girls in my class. My shirt was always tucked in, but I forever felt

uncomfortable in the constraints of God's grace, it feeling less like love and more like a schedule prepared and sent on ahead before me. Cory became an animal too, angry at his father for leaving his mother and angry at his mother for not stopping him. He's getting married in the fall and I wonder if he'd remember me and the sticky hands and the smelling like mud.

My pastor, Dave Charlton, was never one to mix politics and the pulpit, but in an entry posted on his personal blog in 2006, he shared his conviction that civil unions for same sex couples should be allowed. Within less than a week, word of the blog became the words of the blog. A private conviction transformed into a public cancer others sought to cut out and destroy.

I remember how silently the church waited for the service to start. The congregation lined into their usual pews, murmuring like an orchestra tuning their instruments offstage. A handful suppressed grins like they were hoping for a good show, but most kept their heads down low. Most were quiet in their rows and weren't fond to speak against amongst friends. The people were quiet, Dave was quiet, and his paper was quiet too during the seconds it settled from his pocket to the podium.

Dave's usual style of preaching was still with an urging kind of passivity. When waving his hands in the air to demonstrate a point, it was almost as if to offer a suggestion, looking more like fanning the inside of a birdcage than imploring spiritual attention. He often paced back and forth across the podium, almost imperceptibly, quickly readjusting his trousers with inward of his wrists – an old habit grown out of the once necessity to relieve stress. But that day he was assertive and vulnerable, impassioned and logistical.

"This morning, I need to talk to you and I need you to listen to me," he said. "I have always been very thankful that we are such a diverse body and can live together and can work together for the good of God's kingdom. But how do I reflect the views of such a diverse congregation? Whose views would I represent without coming in opposition with another? I can only reflect my own views. I cannot and will not live in anyone's box – either one built by your expectations or one built by my fears."

From the balcony I watched the bright morning light shining through the cuts of stained glass coloring the perms, suits, and motionless faces of the people sitting below in blotches of purple and green, as if they were so far into a space, the place was no longer clear, a whole world resting under a leaf and the sunlight beating through.

"I would not only fight for your right to your opinion. I would also fight for you. And I will stand by you because my love for you will

always reach beyond any differences that might exist with our opinions. In the timeless words of St. Paul, 'If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.'

"I fear no one save God, and I am grateful that he alone is the judge of my soul."

Dave left New Castle and moved on to another church in Shelbyville twenty miles down the road, but I have not moved on. When I come home during the winter and the summer, I feel as if I'm returning to a town of ghosts. The signs on the café in the square change as the owners change and the same two stores in the old buildings around the courthouse never last longer than a year, but the lives and the minds of the people in the town never change, forever moving on the same worn circuits like spirits repeating the day before their death and I dead along with them.

Words like salvation and father and grace and love – all words holding the old bodies together, and yet the individual meanings of the words never contested and the mouths never knowing the visions to be maligned. Each word from each mouth forms planets of varying size, topography, and density – never in orbit, never moving in unison, knocking against one another in the dark of a room never opened.

In the fall, the deer of our town do not go near the rivers and lakes between the hills because they imagine the cottonmouths and the copperheads in the moving of the bright gold leaves caught in the reeds by the water's edge – never feeling the bite but always knowing the fear.

The people in the town live behind the borders of the trees around their fields, the fields around their homes, the carpet around their rooms, the dark grey matter around their minds, saying what I must be and who I must love – the town never feeling the bite, but always knowing the fear.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but do not have love, but do not have love, but do not have love–

In everything I see, I see the same thing: the yearning for heaven and the never getting; the needing for clean, but so little the knowing, so little the need. I live in the same trap as my old church and my old faith. They have simplified me and I am forever simplifying them and imposing on them my own vision of the cottonmouths and the pools of dark water.

It's been three years since either my mother or I sat through a service at New Castle First Baptist. She still cleans the church every Friday and Saturday night, listening to Aretha Franklin on her iPod as she polishes the banister and pushes the vacuum between the pews because she can't stand the sounds the church makes in the night. The heater thumping on sounds like a man stomping his feet like he knows his way around, like he's come in to get something and he knows where it is. I've been alone in the church at night and I know what she's afraid of. There is the feeling of being hunted – not for flesh, but for expulsion. The church is beautiful and warm in the day, but it is most honest when empty in the dark.

When I'm home for college I help with the vacuuming. To get to the storage closet, I pass a large painting looking down the mouth of a river. The yellowing canvas looks as if it has been hanging in a room filled with smoke, the sky and the trees and the water all blending together like looking out from the opening of a sickly cave. I've passed this painting since I was a child, but not until now do I see there is a naked man crossing the shallow water. His skin is the color of the woods and he looks as if he is just discovering the river for the first time. He hasn't come to measure the breadth of the water, but to understand it and to measure other rivers against it.

I spent much of my high school years with my hands in my hair in front of the computer, trying to find by the night ways to make myself clean. As my father was fading out of my life, I met Mitch Walters in a chatroom on Yahoo! Messenger. In the five years we've been friends, he's become more than a friend, but also a mentor and a third parent. He talked to me through high school, my parent's divorce, and college. We talked about God and Flannery O'Connor. He introduced me to Annie Dillard and *The Awful Truth*. In the summer of 2011, he invited me to come down to visit him and his boyfriend Ken of thirty-three years on their farm in Enid, Oklahoma.

My grandfather came close to death six times before I boarded the Greyhound from Louisville to Oklahoma City. In the night before I left, I stayed with my grandfather in his hospital room and read *Through the Looking Glass*. He had wanted to die, but was hospitalized after getting pneumonia and becoming nonresponsive. His lungs were filling with water and his breathing sounded like a percolator.

When he awoke the next morning, he tried to run away. He grabbed his catheter and tried to rip it out. "You can't stop me," he said, and fell back to sleep. He looked up at me and asked, "Have you seen my daughter running around? On the ground, running around?" Every five minutes he awoke in a new memory. "Did you hear your brother got the job in Nashville?" "Why are you doing this to me?" "Where's your dad been?" "Get me out of here." "I hate you." "Your grandmother looks so fine in that bright new dress."

There was a peace in those moments I've never known in

sleep. Looking at his legs looking like my legs as they kicked back the sheets, my assurance things stay the same was falling apart and I was comforted in the not knowing. The family standing around and watching his brain fire off neurons at random was like watching castles being built in the air and torn back down. Our lives were being repeated in front of us and we couldn't understand what it meant, but it felt like heaven. We lost our hunger and remembered sex as something only other people did in other cities and other movies.

I knew there was nothing I could do at home. The summer was almost over and I knew my grandfather would be gone before I came back. It was the middle of August and it was one hundred and thirteen degrees when I walked off the Greyhound into Oklahoma City, so Mitch, Ken, and I headed out in their sand-colored Lexus to spend the week in New Mexico.

Having grown up in Kentucky, I had never before seen rain from a distance. At first it didn't look like rain at all, but like dark smudges against the flat landscape: seven slanting pillars scattered around the car, all around as if to separate the sky from the earth and hold gravity down at the ground.

Radiohead's "Bodysnatcher" was playing on the car stereo. Ken had a way of singing along to words he'd never heard like a dog harmonizing to music, matching each tone in the back of his throat and holding it out like a prayer. The windows were down and the air was dry and cool and Ken was bellowing along in that way like a monk chanting in the back of his throat.

When Mitch, Ken, and I visited the pueblos in Taos, we saw a native woman sloshing water from her clear plastic bottle onto the dry shaded ground near the homes. "To make it rain," she said, looking up into the mountains curtaining the back of the town. We could see dark smudges caught in the rocks. "It has rained in the mountains all summer, but it does not come down here."

In the afternoon, we bought cornmeal desserts filled with jelly and baked every day in *hornos* – dome-shaped ovens outside of the homes. As a Pueblo woman handed Ken his change, she asked, pointing to Mitch, "Are you two brothers?" Both men were wearing hats, had graying hair, and wore round glasses. Neither looked at the other, but both were smiling. No, Ken said, we live together. The Pueblo woman laughed and nodded. "I lived with my friend for a very long time and people always asked us if we are sisters. If you live with someone long enough, you begin to look like them."

We sat under the trees by the creek and bit into the desserts filled with an apricot jelly that didn't taste too sweet. As we ate and watched the water from the mountain run through the creek below, the clouds

over us grew dark and the rain came down everywhere heavy.

Thousands of visitors go every year to Santuario de Chimayo for healing. They go for the holy dirt. There was a flier tacked on a message board in the foyer of the church that stated some have found healing by spreading holy dirt over their bodies to heal their physical ailments, but some have not. The church does not claim or deny that the dirt has any real effect at all, but the church is famous for the dirt and most come for the dirt, all except for Mitch, Ken, and myself.

Every spare space on the outside of the sanctuary was covered in crosses. Everywhere were crosses made of metal and stone, covered in homemade crucifixes and multi-colored rosary beads brought by visitors who came for healing. Most of the crosses were made of twigs tied together with Wonder Bread twist-ties, some of Popsicle sticks, and others were particleboard cross cutouts bought from the Walmart not six miles away in Espanola.

The old cottonwoods growing around the lawn were riddled with these crosses in the cracks and nooks of their bark. Visitors nailed their crosses in parts of the trees where there was nowhere else to stick them and some were tied to the trees with string. On several boulders around the shrines, there were crosses made of chewing gum pressed flat against the stone faces. Around marble statues of St. Frances and Christ and Mary were cheap candles and plastic flowers and Post It notes pleading for mercy and healing.

Past the paintings of Christ and the saints on the walls of the church was a nondescript door leading to the dirt room. At first we came into a kind of narrow foyer with the ceiling hanging low. Crutches hung against the back wall like artillery and baby shoes lined the shelves as if waiting at the front door of a daycare anywhere. The walls were covered in pictures of bald children lying in hospital beds, of grandparents, and of veterans old and young. Tchotchkes and holy shrines mingled on fold out tables held up by flimsy metal legs. The room had the unusual atmosphere of a museum, a junk store, and my grandmother's attic, all mixed together as if the things were arranged by someone who didn't know the difference or understood the difference and didn't care.

I didn't go into the dirt room, but I looked inside. It was small in comparison to the room adjacent. Two white women were squatting on the stone floor over a circle cut a foot deep into the ground. They held bright green plastic shovels and cried as they scooped the orange dirt from the circle into white paper to-go bags. I wondered of what sickness would cause these women to gather the earth and not feel ashamed.

There was this sense that Chimayo was a non-place, an everyplace; off the map. As if to be touched by the healing fires of heaven,

one must first humble themselves in this one arrangement of dirt and wood and plastic and wax.

Outside, an elderly white woman was standing over her husband who sat on a bench facing her and the cottonwoods. She was wearing a bright yellow cable knit sweater, but her face was relaxed and her eyes were closed as if her hands resting over her husband's pink scalp were nothing out of the ordinary. On the way back to the car, we passed the same two women from the dirt room, each holding on to the other. Their faces were obscured in each other's arms, but I could hear one saying to the other, "It's a powerful place."

When I had said goodbye to Mitch at the Greyhound terminal in Oklahoma City, I called my mother and she told me my grandfather had died and my cousins would pick me up on their way to my final stop in Bowling Green, Kentucky. It was silent on the bus. The air was tight from the AC as we waited for the driver to finish his smoke break and take us home.

My mother told me that before he died, my grandfather thought he was already dead. They wheeled him into the nursing home and he kept saying their pastor, Brother Ray, had lied to him. "This isn't what it's like," he said. "This isn't what it's like." He knew his heaven would be all the things his god let him lose in life: steady hands and steady feet. He knew when he died he'd run until it got dark out and return to the basement of his ranch lined with cedar, working till day bringing life to shapeless hunks of wood.

The birth of his son and two daughters and their children began with an inspection to see if they had his thumbs, which more closely resembled deformed toes. His fleshy crescents were clumsy to hold but gave him control when working at the lathe. The force of his hand stretched over the curve of his thumb turned thick wood to silhouettes of cars and animals, carving sycamore trucks with drawer pulls for wheels and dark-stained ducks on sticks with rubber paddle feet that slapped against the cool cement floor. He didn't have the mind for high school but he had the hands of a creator. He could hear the shapes of his dreams speak through the scraps of wood. In the middle of the night, he'd trail to the kitchen table to fill up notebooks with primary shapes and the blueprints for cabinets that still hang over the kitchen sink.

Roger was the only one with the creator thumbs, and for that his family was grateful. Every time Roger slipped on the bathmat or fell down the stairs without a bruise, his children would all say to themselves, "God, I hope I have his bones." He had the bones of an ogre, but the bullheadedness of one too, and that his children dreaded in themselves. He couldn't stand straight with the water in his brain but still fought for his right to piss without a walker.

His greatest creation was his garden. My grandfather often had trouble saying what he meant in words, but he was most articulate in the caring for his plants. The bushes and grass were always kept straight and green into fall. His four tall rose bushes shone pink all summer against the window of my grandmother's bedroom. The older he became, the closer he stayed to the front door until he didn't leave the porch from where he watched the bushes and the grass grow tall and imagined the roses becoming wild out of sight against the brick wall.

Helpless on the stoop, his face rounded and became pale and child-like by the understanding there is no shame in accepting everything falls apart. He accepted chaos would overrun because he knew soon it all would be wiped clean. He believed a day was coming when a white flame would settle on his house and his legs. It would purify his spirit and burn away the weeds overrunning his garden. As I now look at their back yard, barren of flowers and vegetables and trees, I know there will be music in the flame like an organ rattling the walls. It will be vengeful and beautiful and nothing will be left standing.

At the funeral, we sang "Heaven Came Down." I don't have faith in God, but I sang the words. I sang that the heaven would come down and the glory would fill my soul. It would be heavy and the sickness would rise to the top and the glory would take its place. The heaven and glory would come down and fill our imaginings with the breath of how our lives should be in the ways we hope and in the ways we dream.

This fall I slept with a man who kept his eyes shut, never looking at me in the eyes, imagining a woman, a hand, or a more beautiful man who would be willing to align to the shape of his need. My life is a looking for the moments when our words and expectations no longer apply. When our rooms filled with the clashing planets are opened and given light. To connect with others through eyes and objects and movement as the moments change; organic. This is my knowing of what it means to be made clean.

After a night of falling asleep between the punch lines of a bad film, by ex and I bundled up and walked out of our dorm room out into the snow. There were no footsteps in the snow and there were no cars in the roads. The only sounds all around were the wind and the snow hitting against our winter jackets. We woke up from *50 First Dates* to the end of the world and it was beautiful. The roads were the sidewalk were the lawn and for an hour, we forgot our old tongue and spoke only in the language of angels.

While everyone bowed their heads in prayer, I slipped my young head below the surface of the warm water. The light coming through the walls of the sanctuary poured into the great tub, the shadow of my white gown cast against the floor of the blue painted pool. I'd

escape through the water and become a new kind of animal without visions or language – never setting a soul against my expectations, my mind for survival never bent against another's making.

When I resurfaced, it was dark and the church was empty. I crawled out of the water and across communion table in front of the baptistery and past the pulpit and pews, soaking the blue carpet in patterns of drizzle and paws. I stumbled out into the church parking lot and waited and it was cold. A former church member found me soaked and feral, scratching my claws against the asphalt. He lifted me onto his shoulders and carried me to his truck and drove me to his home where he took sheep sheers to the buffalo hair grown thick over my face and a hatchet to the talons on my hands. He bathed me, prepared a meal for me, and gave me his bed to sleep in.

"I know you," the man said. "You have always been one of our kind. There is a hopefulness in our hatred and in our fear. We each have a vision of the angels we could be and of the angels we should be and we destroy one another because we never become."

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels and of leaves in the reeds and of memories and of roses and of snow and dirt and wood and crosses made of twigs and twist ties but do not have love, but do not have love but do not have love —

A Portrait of the Murder

Katheryne Newman

His head was all over the wall.

That was the first thing Officer Luanne Peterson noticed when she walked past the hysterical landlord and entered the dingy apartment's single bedroom.

His head was all over the wall, and most of his blood was all over everything else, and even though this was the most horrifying thing she'd ever seen—even worse than the fellow who'd got run over by his own combine and laid rotting in a field for three days-all she could think about was finger-painting.

She and Darnell'd had a set of paints when they were kids, an awkward Christmas present from a distant but well-meaning aunt, and they were only allowed to use them if their mother was around to supervise. But one rainy Saturday Momma had been out shopping and Daddy was sleeping in his armchair, and if he stood on a chair, Darnell was tall enough to reach the linen closet's top shelf, where Momma had put the paints away.

The little jar of red paint had been very full.

She managed to fight off the initial urge to vomit, though her stomach was roiling and she knew her supper would be coming up at some point. She had to be professional, she told herself, thinking of the boys back at the station. A law enforcement officer, someone who could keep it together when everyone else was losing their minds. The landlord was losing his mind at the moment, so she had to keep it together. She concentrated on the scene in front of her, her eyes scanning the room to create a loose sequence of events. There'd been a struggle, no doubt about that. The cheap furniture had been tossed every which way, most of it streaked with blood.

And his head was all over the wall. From where she stood in the doorway, Luanne could count six roundish, bloody spots dented into the plaster, a couple of them still dribbling . . . stuff. She swallowed and looked elsewhere.

The blood was everywhere. As she stepped further into the room, she could see that a lot of it was staining the front of the poor man's shirt, and that some of it had pooled next to his body. But it was *everywhere*, somehow—staining the blue-gray bed sheets in ungainly splotches, streaked on the overturned nightstand and still-lit lamp, and spread in long, dripping swathes across the bedroom walls, looking for all the world like a gruesome sort of paint.

Momma found them in the basement three hours later, both of

them covered in paint. Luanne had just been drawing pictures on old newspapers with her fingers, but she and Darnell had fought over colors a few times. Darnell had also gotten the bright idea to upend the jar of red on the concrete basement floor, so he could cover his hands and arms and legs with it and lay down with his head in it and play dead like a soldier in some movie he'd seen at a friend's house.

He'd been laying that way for the fourth time with Momma got home from the grocery store. Luanne always remembered the sight of it, him laying there with the paint in his blond hair, his eyes closed and his tongue lolling like a cartoon character's, and then Momma had yelled for them and Darnell sat bolt upright, looking for a moment simultaneously dead and alive.

Luanne stared at the smashed-in face of the dead man. He did not stir, and after a few seconds she ducked out of the room to throw up.

Conversations with the Taj Mahal

Timothy Phelps

Winston Schreff sat in the basement of his suburban Cincinnati home gluing Popsicle sticks together. He'd done this for years, wasted countless skin cells peeling dried Elmer's off his chubby fingertips when he finished. He'd done far more than he ever expected now that he had so much time on his hands. Behind him stood one of his first attempts—the Washington Monument—that only stood about two feet tall. Even though it was a little crooked, it was an easy one to try for a beginner, a simple obelisk that lent itself well to the rigidity of miniature building materials. He'd done it in a week nearly ten years past, and it had sat there since, dust filling in the cracks between the sticks that betrayed the evidence of unskilled hands. All along the butcher-block workbench stood his other efforts. His largest one to date, a forty-five-by-twenty-inch Acropolis, rested on a plywood base in the corner, complete with crumbling façades and columns. Upstairs, in an oak curio he'd inherited from his mother, stood a 1:285 scale model of the Eiffel Tower made from matchsticks. It won the top prize at the '62 Ohio State Fair in Columbus. A far cry from that slightly twisted and out-of-plumb Washington Monument he'd done so long ago. Over the years he had gotten better at it. A man could get better, he supposed, with so much time.

Carl, the mailman, seemed a little surprised when Winston opened the door. He had to be under twenty, Winston thought. "Oh, hi, Mr. Schreff. I guess I can just give these to you."

Carl handed Winston three letters and a Sears, Roebuck & Company catalogue that he was about to drop into the mailbox next to the door.

The boy shifted the bill of his peaked mail carrier's cap. He motioned at the catalogue, tried to be friendly. "Those things sure come in handy, don't they? It's nice to be able to buy the things you need without leaving the house, isn't it?"

Winston didn't respond. He turned over the glossy book and looked at the cover. Two women who looked even younger than Carl wore tight yellow and orange dresses and stood unnaturally cheek to cheek against a red background. They both looked angry.

"Well, you know, if someone wanted to do that anyway. You know, never leave the house, I mean." He caught himself, and held out his hand. "Not to say that's you, Mr. Schreff. I meant, you know…"

He cleared his throat. "Say, my grandpa once bought a pistol from those guys in the teens for a dollar fifty-five. Can you believe that? Isn't that something?"

"Sure is, Carl. I'll see you next time, okay?"

Carl started to back up. "You bet, Mr. Schreff. See you tomorrow. Tell Nosferatu that I said hi."

"It's Nefertiti."

Carl chuckled at nothing, awkwardly backing down the sidewalk. He finally waved and turned toward the neighbor's house, and the smile immediately left his face.

Winston's calico cat, having heard her name, rubbed against Winston's slacks. With effort, he bent from his hips and scratched Nefertiti on her head. She pushed up against his fingers and purred.

"That's right," he told her. "You love me, don't you?"

One could argue the hardest part about building miniature sculptures was the curves, but Winston knew better. The hardest part was the doors. If you really wanted an accurate representation, then you needed your little wooden doors to open and close, and not get stuck in the process. This was even more difficult if you wanted to create the joints solely out of wood. A traditionalist like Winston would never use a metal rod to make his hinges, like some people. Henry Paulson did a door like that on his Lincoln cabin two years ago at the '64 fair and won second place. Winston put in a formal protest, but instead the judges asked him why he cared. He'd won first place again, hadn't he? His argument that they were missing the point fell on deaf ears. Ever since, Winston had not submitted a sculpture. He had values, and they weren't going to be usurped by the shoddy workmanship of one Henry Paulson.

Winston fitted the toothpick pin inside the wooden barrel of his door and attached it to his creation. He closed the new door, and it disappeared onto the face of the dome, fitting without gaps between two uprights. *That's right*, he thought, *try* that *Paulson. An all-wood, hidden door on a curve.* No one could beat him when he was at his best.

Winston pushed on the second stick from the right, heard the click of the wooden, inner latch, and the door popped open. No little handle, no picking at the corners. That would defeat the purpose of it being hidden. He swung the door wide—it was large enough to see inside his sculpture with both eyes—and smiled as the hinges released a sweet little squeak. He peeked through the hole.

"Hello in there," he whispered. "You're all buttoned up now. Isn't that cozy?"

Nefertiti pranced down into the basement and sat between her

master's shoes.

He stopped sitting on his porch after the fall of 1959. He used to enjoy the sunsets that would fall right between two lines of houses at the end of the road. As perfect as in the movies. Then four boys in a light blue '55 Merc pulled up and beat Winston with a Louisville Slugger.

Before he retired a decade ago, before any of his creations had been built, Winston taught history to seniors at Parkville Community Senior High School in east Cincinnati. Back then, his wife Geraldine had loved to be a housewife in suburbia. They never could have children, so they had pets instead. First it was Caesar, a short-lived poodle; then Cleopatra, the tabby. When that cat finally died, he and Geraldine just carried on with each other's company, and their combined admiration for history.

He'd always had an appreciation for the wealth of knowledge in the world, which is why he was so meticulous with his miniatures. Anyone could flip over a cardboard box and call it the Taj Mahal, but Winston knew the details. He'd studied them, and in some cases, been there. He was even fortunate enough to have brought a group of seniors and chaperones to New York in the spring of '55 to study Ancient Egypt at the Museum of Natural History. The trip was fascinating—the exhibit had a walk-through mock-up of a pyramid interior. The children and Winston learned about hieroglyphics, and tomb reliefs, and embalming. Winston heard several of the students say how "crazy" the trip was, and how Mr. Schreff was even "hep," not just "hip." Winston later learned this was a compliment.

It was the success of the trip that made it so much more devastating when Rosie Jenkins accused Winston of inappropriate advances when they returned. Rosie had just turned seventeen at the time, young for a senior in the spring, and Winston had not allowed her to go on the New York trip because of her grades. She was angry, and vengeful, and even when his name was cleared, even after the three long months passed and Rosie admitted it was a hoax, Mr. Schreff had a lingering stench on his name like a road-killed skunk. Rosie Jenkins moved away that summer. The following September, when Winston returned to teach after summer vacation, he found that his class was all but empty. Parents wouldn't let him teach their children. Students felt uncomfortable alone with him. Teachers he'd known for decades eyed him as he walked by.

His name had become Molester Schreff in the football locker room.

Geraldine left him September 9th of that year. Said she was sorry, that she tried really hard for months, but she couldn't even go to the supermarket anymore.

Winston retired early from Parkville Community Senior High School only two months after the start of classes, and began work on the Washington Monument the following week.

There's a precision to building with Popsicle sticks, one that requires patience and practice. Now finished with the rough structure of the central building, Winston began working on the first of the four minarets surrounding the Taj Mahal. Compared to the simple American tower behind him, each of these were cylindrical, had two ornate platforms, and an open-air turret at the peak. He supposed each minaret would take his experienced hands ten days or more. The Taj Mahal's footprint was five feet by five feet, by far the largest sculpture he had ever attempted. Even if he wanted to, it would never leave this basement. The creation stood on plywood pallets to keep it off the moisture of the concrete, and it would be as tall as Winston when it was finished. Even now, he had to support himself on the low floor joists above his head so he could lean far enough to look into his perfect little window.

He glanced in, and left the window open. He sat in a folding chair and started on the first level of the northwest minaret. He groaned through the discomfort of his broken ribs that had never really healed correctly following the attack.

Nefertiti hissed at the unsealed window and scurried upstairs. Winston ignored her. She was just being testy.

"You know I never really cared much for television, but Peter Marshall has this new show called 'The Hollywood Squares'. I was cracking up, it was so funny."

Winston consulted his list of measurements, holding them at arm's length under the bare light bulb. He held a single stick up to his scale ruler, notched each end with an X-Acto, and pulled his cutting board onto his lap.

"No, no. You're thinking of Jim Lange. He's on 'The Dating Game' show, I think. Haven't seen that one yet."

Winston made a cut on one end of his Popsicle stick, ridding himself of the curve. He chuckled.

"You'll never guess who was on the Hollywood one, though. Ernest Borgnine! Yeah, I know! Lieutenant Commander McHale himself. Would you believe it? It was a gas."

The other end came off the stick. Perfectly square. Didn't even need to check it anymore. No one could beat him when he was at his best. Then he heard something he didn't expect.

"Yes, of course I love you. Don't say that. Listen, if I had known you were awake, I wouldn't have gone up to watch it. I would have stayed with you." He paused, looking up at the shadowed hole. "I just won't watch it anymore. Simple as that."

Silence passed.

Winston put his board and knife on the floor, stood up, and leaned over until he could see through his perfect little window.

"I've got an idea. How about I get the television down here somehow? Then we could both watch it together. I won't need to leave anymore. Would you like that?"

Another moment passed. The joist Winston held on to creaked under his weight.

"Yes, I thought you would."

As much as Winston didn't enjoy being seen outside his home, maintenance sometimes forced it. He walked behind his reel mower on a spring Friday. He was nearly finished with the yard when he saw the girl walking on the sidewalk. She was maybe seventeen or eighteen, and was dainty, slim, classy. She looked like Audrey Hepburn in a school uniform. She carried a small stack of books in the crook of her elbow. If he had realized it was so close to the end of the school day, he would have waited until later to cut grass just to avoid this sort of thing. She saw him see her, and she looked surprised. He averted his gaze and squatted down to pull the blades of oily fescue from the inside of each wheel. Winston would let her pass.

The clack of her short heels slowed as she came nearer. "Excuse me?" she called.

It was Winston's turn to be surprised. He stupidly looked around. "Me?"

She laughed, an innocent little smirk. "Yeah. Aren't you Mr. Schreff?"

Winston knew how this was going. And he didn't want any part of it. He turned his attention back to his work in distain. She saw his hesitation.

"No, it's nothing like that, mister. I promise." Winston gave her a bit of his attention back. "See, my older brother had you a long time ago. History, right?"

Winston nodded.

She looked down and kicked a weed that was growing in the

sidewalk crack. "My brother swore up and down that you were one of the best teachers he ever had. He never believed any of that nonsense, not from the start."

Winston relaxed a touch. It had been a long time since he had received any compliments about his teaching days. "Tell your brother I said thanks."

"And you know, I've never seen you out before, so I just thought I'd say hi."

"I appreciate that." He rose, dusted his hand on his pant leg, and offered it to her. "I'm Winston Schreff."

She shook it with a smile. "Marlene Braden. Daniel's my brother."

"That's right, that's right. I remember him. Tell him I said hello."

Her smile disappeared. "I would, but he's in Fort Benning. He's going to Vietnam next Tuesday, I think. I'll write it in my letter, though."

"I'm sorry to hear that. Messy business over there, that."

"Sure is, Mr. Schreff." She went back to kicking the weed.

"Just Winston is fine. I'm not a teacher anymore."

"Okay, Winston."

Marlene left soon after, and Winston found himself thrilled to have human contact again, even if it was with a senior in high school. It was refreshing to speak to someone who didn't think he was the devil incarnate.

Winston found more and more reasons to be outside when school let out. The garden was kept up for the first time since Geraldine left. The shrubs were trimmed, the sidewalk weeded. Marlene would drop by for a few minutes on her way home every weekday and chat. She was seventeen, after all, but would turn eighteen soon. She had college plans at a girls' school Winston had never heard of. She was sweet and lovely, and even though Winston recognized his feelings as a longing for human interaction again, he sometimes went to sleep at night wondering if he were falling in love. Probably the love wasn't for her as much as for the interaction, but he still couldn't help but wonder.

After weeks of this, Winston saw a boy walking Marlene home. The boy's James Dean was a sharp contrast to Marlene's Hepburn. He had his arm around her shoulder, but she was holding her own books, and he didn't have anything. She passed with a quick hello, but nothing more. He wanted to smack the boy and tell him to have some respect for her. He could at least carry her books.

Before they were out of earshot, Winston heard the boy say, "Why'd you say hi to that creep? I heard he cuts up little girls and buries them in the backyard."

Marlene slapped him on the shoulder. "He's a sweet old man, Pete. Give him a break."

Pete the greaser said something else to her, but they were too far away. Whatever he said, Marlene drew closer to Pete and put her head on his leather-clad shoulder. Winston suddenly realized he was fat, old, and ill-equipped to pull Marlene's attention from a fellow like Pete.

The television droned on in the background of the basement. Winston was lost in his work. The main internal supports for the first minaret were in place, and Winston was beginning to fill in the circular façade. Being so close to the ground was killing his knees, though. He stood and stretched.

"What's that?" He looked through the window. "Yes, I saw it in the obituaries this morning, too. I'm so sorry. I know it won't make you feel better, but your brother died serving his country."

Marlene lay on his kitchen floor, her usually narrow chin and neck swollen with the ravages of anaphylactic shock. She had seemed so hesitant to come in at first, even with all her faith that Winston Schreff wasn't the monster the whole town claimed he was. So instead of inviting her down to a dingy, wet basement, he went down to bring up one of his smaller creations. She'd already seen his Eiffel Tower, and he could have sworn he saw a look of endearment—love, even!—on her face. It took him a few minutes to settle on something—should he bring up the Washington Monument or the Golden Gate Bridge?—and by the time he'd returned, she was dead, spread-eagle on the floor with her skin the color of steel and bloody vomit down her chin and dress. On the floor, in crumbles, lay the remains of the chocolate chip cookie she'd eaten, the ones he'd made her for her birthday. Nefertiti was crouched down and licking the chocolate from the remnants.

Winston had fallen down and tried to revive her, tried to clear her mouth just in case there was some blockage, called out her name, even slapped her on her swollen face, but it wasn't any use, and now she was gone for good, the only woman he'd had any feelings for since Geraldine, and Jesus Christ, didn't he tell her there were walnuts in the cookies, and didn't she know she was allergic? Oh, God, Marlene's parents! One son just off to war and now they'd lost their daughter! And it was all his fault. He climbed off the floor in a panic and picked up the phone to call the police, to tell them to get someone here right

now, to tell them it wasn't his fault! But it was his fault. And no one would ever believe it wasn't. No one would ever think that he hadn't lured this innocent girl with cookies, for Christ's sake, and murdered her. She was so young, so young. Winston hung up the phone without dialing a number. Instead, he dropped down again to her side and begged for forgiveness, asked God to just bring her back, just give him ten minutes back. His lovely little innocent, his sweet Hepburn, his Cleopatra, his Sammuramat, his Mumtaz Mahal.

He rocked her in his arms until he stopped crying. For hours, it seemed. He apologized some more, and somewhere in the middle of it, he knew what to do. His options were limited in the first place, but it didn't matter anymore. She needed a proper burial, one that was fit for a woman like her.

It took a trip to the library before he felt reminded about the steps that needed to happen next, and then to three different hardware stores and supermarkets to get enough soda ash and baking soda.

Winston left Parkville Community Senior High School for the final time. His retirement had come with little fanfare: just three cards that were written by people who tried to pretend that retirement was what Winston wanted, and a cursory cake and social in the teachers' lounge where people spoke in one-word sentences between long periods of silence. The filing box he carried held the last few trinkets and memorabilia of better times.

Instead of going straight into his house, he put his box on the porch and sat in the rocker. He didn't feel like walking into silence. As he watched the sun set that evening, it occurred to him just how lonesome his life was about to become. Now with teaching extinguished from his life, he understood he would have to come up with something to soak up his time.

But the hardest part was Geraldine. She had been gone for nearly seven weeks, this perfect woman he always thought he'd share his last years and sunsets with. Sure, he could find some hobby to fill the hours, but he wondered if he would ever find someone else to fill the void she left behind. Someone to be there so his house wouldn't feel so empty. Just someone to have conversations with.

She'd lost all of her swelling in the days following her death, and had shrunken even more through the embalming process. Winston had to curl her knees to her chest for the procedure, because he knew how large her memorial would need to be if she were stretched out. She

was ready earlier than Winston expected, and he got to work.

He considered a pyramid, because she had been mummified. Despite the ancient Egyptians' technological achievements, however, they had little in the way of architectural flamboyance. Marlene deserved a more elaborate memorial. Two months later, in front of the miniature Taj Mahal, he fitted the toothpick pin inside the wooden barrel of his door and attached it to his creation. He closed the new door, and it disappeared onto the face of the dome, fitting without gaps between two uprights. *That's right*, he thought, *try* that *Paulson. An all-wood, hidden door on a curve.* No one could beat him when he was at his best.

Winston pushed on the second stick from the right, heard the click of the wooden, inner latch, and the door popped open. No little handle, no picking at the corners. That would defeat the purpose of it being hidden. He swung the door wide—it was large enough to see inside his sculpture with both eyes—and smiled as the hinges released a sweet little squeak. He peeked through the hole.

"Hello in there," he whispered. "You're all buttoned up now. Isn't that cozy?"

Nefertiti pranced down into the basement and sat between her master's shoes.

The Best Laid Plans of God and English Majors
Jennifer Recchio

I. Introduction

Thesis: "The trick," God says over a cup of Starbucks
during his Tuesday meeting with Zeus, "Is to outline.
That's why you lost power. You never had a plan."

A. "Waste of time," Zeus argues, "Better to
play it
by the seat of your pants. Humans break
the outline anyway."

B. "It's a matter of paying attention and being
prepared."
God picks up the check because Zeus is broke,
the bum god of Olympus. Zeus returns

II. Body

A. and asks Hermes to steal the cliff notes
for the universe so he can see
what all the fuss is about.

B. Hermes sneaks in but has trouble
because God likes mind maps
and has illegible handwriting.

C. God shakes his head and tells Zeus
that he needs to think more like a lawyer
and never ask a question he doesn't know

D. the answer to. "Have you considered
my servant Job?" God says. "I only bet
when I know I can win."

III. Conclusion

Restate Thesis: But Zeus enjoys a gamble and thinks
it's more fun when the future is uncertain.
Omniscience gets boring after a while.

Falling Stars
Jennifer Recchio

"Shoot for the moon, if you miss you'll land among the stars!"

They forgot to teach their children
about the pain of hitting the ground,
cracking open their skulls on a rock,
brains sliding out like uncooked egg yolk.
Instead they taught them wrong astronomy,
said the stars are closer than the moon,
and space is full of air to swim through
where your insides won't be pulled out
through vacuum suction.
Optimists.
So their children crawled into cannons
aimed at the moon
convinced there could be no bad result
that trying will always lead to some kind of success.
They painted the ground with red and gray
while the pessimists walked around the mess
and wondered what could possibly be
so great about the moon.

The Abridged Handbook on How to Act Appropriately in a Traditional Baptist Church
Monica Spees

The following guidelines are brought to you courtesy of a member of a church under the jurisdiction of the Southern Baptist Convention. This member has titled the guidelines as abridged due to the fact that all points listed are biblically based. You're welcome to search the Word for these guidelines, but the member knows that, even if you find them, you will refuse to believe the truth and interpret Scripture incorrectly. That being said, please read this carefully.

1. Do not drink alcohol. Ever. (The angel of the Lord told Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, that his son should "never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks" and he "will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth." (Luke 1:15-16))
2. If you dance, it is a dishonor to God, because people in the Bible who were demon-possessed gyrated. (Disregard the fact that King David danced in celebration of God. That was different because he was David, the man after God's own heart. And you can get out of performing the required P.E. class dance in front of the entire high school if you cite religious reasons. We have religious freedom in America because this is God's chosen country.)
3. You should not miss church unless you are sick or have some other viable reason. Be warned: if you skip, the rest of us church members will incessantly ask you where you were and insist that you missed a wonderful service, therefore should not miss again lest you miss out on profound teachings. (Look at the believers at Pentecost in Acts 2:42. "All believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, *and to fellowship*, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer." (emphasis added))
4. As 1 John 2:15-16 tells us, we should not love the world or the things in the world, such as physical pleasure or achievements, because anyone who fixates on worldly things does not have the love of the Father in them. However, if you happen to be very wealthy and with many occupational achievements, God welcomes your contribution to the church. Giving money can show the Father's love.
5. Money is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10), but if put to the proper use is totally okay.
6. If you seek forgiveness in the church after suffering drug addiction, murdering people (even Christians), robbing banks, or being an atheist, we will accept you wholeheartedly. Christ forgave all

sins (Colossians 2:13). But if you've had sex before marriage, we'll have no choice but to ostracize you. (Note to sexually active teens: the only time it is acceptable to admit your premarital sex is during the emotional final night of weekend youth group retreats. Not before, not after.)

7. Per Adam and Eve's divine union in the Garden of Eden, it's obvious that God intended us to be married. Paul may have said in 1 Corinthians 7 that it is better for people to remain single so they can focus on the Lord's work, but there is no record that Paul was attractive or ever had a woman. We have to take that into consideration.
8. God told Noah in Genesis 9 that animals, fruits, and vegetables were given to us to eat. Attending various potlucks (fellowship again) that result in weight gain should not cause you shame. Remember that gluttony does not just refer to food. The Bible's teachings on self-control typically apply to sexual sin.
9. You should participate in singing, loudly, the hymns and songs at church. Psalm 100 tells us to shout with joy to the Lord. Not only do you look unhappy if you don't sing, you're implying that you aren't moved by God's love. Just as long as you don't get too moved. Raising your hands is a bit too Pentecostal for a traditional Baptist church.
10. The Bible teaches against abortion, homosexuality, women in charge, and other deplorable liberal ideas. It goes without saying that if you're not a conservative, you're not a Christian.

Fine Wine
Samantha Starr

On a good day, my mother is sweet like a chilled glass
of Moscato, embodying the cold drinks I took
as I sat in that old lawn chair, letting the sun soak into my skin
and sweat out the stress of school work and social anxiety.
And on a bad day, like a glass of Cabernet,
my mother is dry with a bitter bite at the end
that keeps me aware of the headache I will have
if I continue resting in the same spot,
staining my lips purple with glass after glass
as I spill secrets and drops onto the white carpet
which reminds me of the white shirt
my mother's friend ruined with a glass of Pinot Noir
after I was dragged along to Louisville
and insistently told that I was not just there for a sober ride
home
but that I was good company and much needed.
And driving home that night, with her snoring in the
passenger seat
and her friend laid out asleep in the back,
I wished for someone else to be with me
and swore to myself I would never be like her. At fifteen,
with my permit in my pocket, I promised in naïveté
to never get drunk to the point that I couldn't remember
and to never use my daughter,
if one day, she were to exist, as a designated driver.
And while I'm driving home tonight,
my vision fogged from three--
no, four--
glasses of Mendoza, thoughts of my mother and where the
night
turned sour are all that I can think of.
I can't help to remember that night at fifteen
or the fact that I've broken the promise I made to myself

and cannot remember every drunken night I've had.
And you're next to me, squeezing my hand and telling me
I am doing a great job driving and handling what just
happened.
Just as the harsh words poured out of my mother's mouth,
they splash across this page, like that summer night when
I splashed across the pool--
drunk--
not just on that bottle of Merlot
but simply from being around you.
And when, with warm fermented breath, you kissed me . . .
my god, it was a good day.

Angry Grapes
Clint Waters

An insatiable wanderlust.
Blood rusting in veins.
Traffic lanes to be crossed,
feelings to be feigned

in some far off forest.
The nation whispers, "Go West."
Its mouth on my earlobe, "California or bust,
'though Oregon's the best."

I've got to feel lost again,
to sin or get sick, to feel
unfamiliar eyes to pin "stranger"
to my chest as drawled vowels

drip from my lips. I need to rinse
this red, dead clay from my feet,
to dump dull dust from my hair,
to cleanse myself of Kentucky.

21 years of black-pepper gravy
and men asking how my mother's been.
At my back, cows covered in feces
stare out from the black fences,

fences my brother and I painted
for our once step father, who sat
far out drinking tea in his truck
that was too wide for the road.

Okies and Arkies, wearing clothes
that are mostly pit-stains and sand,
cuss over busted, blown gaskets

but I cannot lend a mending hand.

I'll reach the ocean by sunrise,
the moon waning at my approach.
I'll read each star before it dies.

Vivisection
Clint Waters

If you were to
split me apart,
cleave me in two
with your hatchet tounge,

what might spill out?

They split the atom
and look at what happened.
Could the things within
turn you to ash?

Could the heartsick
flame inside my stomach
eat you up? Could it pin your
silhouette to the floor?

Perhaps all the words
I've swallowed for you
would make their bloody revolt
and swarm out like flies:

A haze of Scrabble pieces
vying for entry to your soul,

to fill your belly
like they've filled mine
making it bulge and stretch
into something cumbersome.

The films behind my eyes
would tumble out,
a Gatling gun slide show
of memories and dreams:

a dog's bloody mouth
beer on your breath
a candle in a Hostess cake
your head on my shoulder
a smoldering cigarette in a sleeping hand
and on and on and on

Until you're tarred with
my neuroses and
feathered with all
these phobias.

Finally I will be
hollow
and horribly content.

"America Bleeds God"
Clint Waters

states the bold block
letters on a bumper
glued to the back
of some jalopy, which is
double-parked on the curb

outside a tittie bar,
where lonely men sit on stools
and spend money they don't have
to get simulated affection
from women who pay

bills with sweaty bills
that swap from hand
to hand, heavy with
their abstract values
established by a

swarm of suits
in a place you've never seen
that is managed by people
whose names you do not know
but pass rules and regulations

on ideas more abstract than
the $4.95 it took to buy
a senseless sticker proclaiming
that a nation cannot only bleed,
but when it does, a deity

flows forth.

Cowboys and Indians
Madalyn Wilbanks

I cringed to call them my brothers
I imagined them swinging their backpacks like lassos,
ready to revenge against me,
the native in their land.

Dust clouds formed with their footsteps
Chants echoed up the drive.
With every second, anger boiled and raged.
A war would begin in our own backyard.
I locked the rusty trap door and waited,
Scowling at the carving in the wood:
"No Girls Allowed".

When did I become the foreigner?
The rival, wearing a dress
A lilac-patterned hair bow branded me
like the feather of an Indian.
My fists curled with wet palms.
August's heat would bring the end
of summer's snowballed turmoil.
Army or not, they knew I waged war.

I cast the ammunition.
Pinecones struck khaki school uniforms.
Rocks pounded on my wooden walls.
Roars bantered and echoed in slow motion
until the loudest of them all caused every howl to halt.
A stern, but fatherly voice
the chief of the land,
the ranger of the ranch,
ordering a peace treaty between the two parties
and demolition to the tree house that rooted our division.

Claustrophobia
Seanna Lyn Wilhelm

I'm forced to watch
two backpacks have sex
as an umbrella swings
like a pendulum
too close to my face,
and some stranger's hip
presses awkwardly into mine
because one of us is too big
for these seats
as a strange mixture
of putrid perfumes
penetrates my nostrils
because people today
seem to bathe in it
the same way that they wallow
in their fear
of eye contact
and too long glances
as if daggers could actually
fly from eyes of ill intent
into the very essence
of our lives.